



REDUCING CHILD POVERTY IN CALIFORNIA

The Lifting Children and Families Out of Poverty Task Force

Assembly Bill 1520 (Chapter 415, Statutes of 2016) established The Lifting Children and Families Out of Poverty Task Force. The principle aim of the Task Force is to recommend future comprehensive strategies to achieve the reduction of deep poverty among children and reduce the overall child poverty rate in the state.

Statement of Problem: Poverty Crisis in Fresno and Root Causes

A city not in the Rust Belt or Appalachia, but in a state rich with agricultural and ethnic heritage that boasts the fifth largest economy in the world (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2018), Fresno has the dubious distinction as home to one the highest concentration of poverty in the United States. In addition, regardless of race, its low-income residents are among the most educationally and economically divided and isolated of any large American city. This, in turn, affects the social and financial viability of disadvantaged children and their families (Sacramento Bee, 2015).

A strategic approach to poverty reduction begins with an examination of its demography and key indicators:

- **Poverty and Income:** Fresno ranks number two in the nation for cities with the highest rates of extreme poverty. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (July, 2017), 30.0% of its population lives below the poverty line, more than twice the national average, 12.7%. The median household income of Fresno, \$41,000, is \$15,000 below the national average. In 2015-2016, 41% of children live below the federal poverty threshold, versus 20% in California and 10.5% in the United States. Persistent childhood poverty, living below the federal poverty level for at least half of one's childhood, is strongly correlated to poor educational and economic outcomes (Kids Count Data Center 2015, 2016; Urban Institute, 2015). In addition, 71.6% of public school students in Fresno were eligible for free or reduced-price school meals, versus 58.6% in California and just over 50% for the U.S. (NCES, 2017).
- **Demographics:** Race and ethnicity is closely associated with poverty. There is a greater likelihood for a minority child to be in poverty as well as a child who has an immigrant parent, or a single female household. Racial and ethnic composition in Fresno are as follows: White (54.2%), Hispanic/Latino (48.6%), and Black/African-American (8.1%) (U.S. Census

Bureau, July 2017). The percentage of children in families with single female householders in Fresno County is 22.6%--higher than that of California, 18.7%. In addition, close to half, 44%, of all children under the age of 18 in Fresno live with one or more foreign-born parent. One in every five Fresno children are foreign-born English learners in public schools (kidsdata.org, 2010-2014).

- **Employment and Labor Market:** In April, 2018, Fresno County's unemployment rate was 7.8%, versus 3.7% for California and 3.6% in the U.S. (State of California, Employment Development Department, June 2018). In addition, the average Fresno hourly wage has consistently lagged behind that of California and the nation. To that end, the average Fresno worker earns 9% less than the national average hourly or annual pay, and 20% less than the average in California (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Also, as young people in their late teens and early twenties transition into adulthood and employment, Fresno data show a particularly at-risk young adult population who are "disconnected" (Brookings, 2016). The city is among the top ten in the country with the lowest employment rate for people ages 16-19 and 20-24. The rate of disconnection for young blacks and Latinos are 3 to 6 times more likely than for young whites.
- **Education Attainment:** U.C. Davis' Center for Poverty Research found that those who had no high school diploma in the United States comprise a far greater share of the population in poverty than their share of the general population (2014). The high school graduation rate of Fresno County was 75.3% in 2017, versus 87.0% in California. The 4-year college degree attainment in Fresno County was 13.1%, lagging behind the state rate of 19.4%. In addition, in 2015, only 13% of Fresno students are reading at or above proficiency level, compared to 36% nationwide (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2015). Children living in poverty struggle to achieve the same success in school as those who grew up in financially-secure households. However, studies have shown that children who grew up in low-income families are not read to as often as those from higher income families. Furthermore, by the start of school, children living in poverty are more likely to have a smaller vocabulary than those from higher income households. Thus, they tend to struggle in school and fall behind their peers. In addition, data show that when parents do not have a high school diploma, the likelihood for the family and their children to live in poverty increases.
- **Health:** In the major health outcome indicators (asthma, diabetes, obesity, and preterm birth) for both adults and children, Fresno county and city incident rates are consistently higher than that of the state and nation (Kaiser Foundation Hospital Fresno's Community Health Needs Assessment, 2016). Asthma diagnosis rate is 21.3% for Fresno children below the age of 17, versus 14.2% statewide and similar trend is seen for adults. Percentage of hospitalization due to diabetes is 35% in Fresno, which is above the 31% in California. The percentage of Fresno children overweight or obese at grade nine is 42% versus 36% in California. In the self-reporting data (kidsdata.org, 2013-2014), percentage of Fresno children in excellent or very good health is 61.3% versus 74.1% in the state. Also, there is a strong association in asthma, diabetes, and obesity rates between parents and their children. Additionally, percentage of infants born preterm in Fresno is 10.2% versus 8.8% in California. Another persistent challenge to both adult and children health status in Fresno

County is the shortage of primary care physicians: 37.6 physicians per 100,000 Fresno residents versus 72.6 per 100,000 Californians.

- **Housing:** Cuts and redirections in federal and state funding have reduced Fresno County's investment in affordable housing production by more than \$21 million annually since 2008, a reduction of over 50%. While the median renter household income, especially those in the lowest-income bracket in the county, has declined 10%, the median rent has increased 22%. Fresno's lowest-income renters spend 68% of household income on rent, leaving a third of their income to food, health care, transportation and other needs, versus the recommended 30% household income contribution to housing (California Housing Partnership Corporation, 2016). Across the board in Fresno County, the housing affordability burden falls disproportionately and hardest on the extreme low income (ELI) households, where over 80% are severely rent burdened, versus 24% for low-income (LI) and 3% for median income (MI) (Fresno Housing Authority, 2016; The National Low Income Coalition, 2017). The percentage of public school students who are homeless is 2.8% in Fresno County which has increased in the past 10 years (FUSD, 2016).
- **Race:** The relationship between racial disparity and poverty is complex. Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality and the American Psychological Association have found that race often determines a person's socioeconomic status (2014). Furthermore, communities with significant racial disparities share, within the communities themselves, similar poverty and economic development indicators. The Race Count Project (2018) has found that Fresno County ranks the eighth most racially disparate county in California. Blacks and Latinos living in Fresno County are subjected to higher-priced housing loans twice more than Asian and Whites. White managerial employment rates are more than twice as high as Black and Asian Rates, and more than three times as high as Latino and Native American rates. Most notably, in Fresno County, Blacks are forty times more likely to be incarcerated than Asian or Pacific Islanders.

Community Needs Assessment and Strategic Planning

Unfortunately, many Americans live on the outskirts of hope—some because of their poverty, and some because of their color, and all too many because of both. Our task is to help replace their despair with opportunity... It will not be a short or easy struggle, no single weapon or strategy will suffice, but we shall not rest until that war is won. The richest Nation on earth can afford to win it. We cannot afford to lose it."

— President Lyndon B. Johnson, declaring a War on Poverty, January 8, 1964

In building a strength-based intervention and strategies platform, it is worth accounting the substantial foundation and progress that the existing legislations have invested in empowering low-income Californians and their children in addressing poverty: increases in the minimum wages, school nutrition programs, the elimination of the maximum family grant rule in the CalWORKS program, housing and utility support programs, expansion of health care,

investments in child development, the California Earned Income Tax Credit, and outreach and assistance with the federal earned income tax credit, etc.

On the local level and since 2010-2011, a pioneering spirit of community collaboration has quietly taken hold in Fresno. Recognizing the war on poverty has many fronts that beckons the call of the most committed, a consortium of organizations has stepped up to the challenge-- **Fresno EOC, Fresno Housing Authority, First 5 Fresno, Central Valley Community Foundation, Fresno Regional Workforce Investment Board, Fresno Economic Development Corporation, Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, Fresno Unified School District, Fresno County Department of Social Services, and Central Valley Children's Services Network.** These are among Fresno EOC's most resolute core partners that have braved the call to combat.

In the spirit of community-based partnership and with the steadfast collaboration of the above organizations, Fresno EOC's 2016-2017 Strategic Planning Process took place. The resultant Comprehensive Community Needs Assessment report shed light on a number of issues linked to the area's recalcitrant poverty rates and their key indicators. Engagements and input were sought in 1,456 surveys from clients, community members, partners, and employees; 20 rural listening sessions with clients and community members; 11 focus groups; 20 stakeholder interviews, and 10 collaborative partner interviews.

This community-driven process identified the highest strategic needs plaguing Fresno residents on their path to self-sufficiency: **(1) Employment Readiness, (2) Quality Education, (3) Health and Wellness, (4) Mental Health, (5) Anti-Violence and Safe Family, (6) Gang and Drug-Related Crimes, (7) Affordable Housing, and (8) Transportation.**

These greatest strategic needs were similarly echoed at **the June 14th, 2018, meeting of the Task Force at Fresno EOC's Street Saint Program location.** Education, job opportunities and employment training, knowledge and resources about youth and leadership development and financial management, access to healthier food and nutrition, and increase investment and accountability in local communities were among the concerns most passionately expressed.

To that end, the war on poverty perseveres. Applying lessons learned to the opportunities and challenges facing a 21st century America, the above Fresno organizations stand ready to align their resources to lift the community's common plight above all others. **Collectively, answering the call to end poverty is this Fresno group's singular agenda.**

Path to Lifting Poverty: Intervention Strategies

In describing the positive steps that city leaders and community activists are working on towards a "better Fresno", the then-Fresno Mayor, Ashley Swearingin, said in 2015 that "essentially what's happening is that people are starting to go after the major systems--schools, jobs, human services, and social justice--and really trying to transition our people from being disabling to empowering, for the sake of improving neighborhoods of concentrated poverty."

Since 2010-2011 and under the joint leadership of **Fresno EOC, Fresno Housing Authority, First 5 Fresno, Central Valley Community Foundation, California State University, Fresno, State Center Community College District, Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, Fresno Unified School District, Fresno Compact, Saint Agnes Medical Center, Fresno County, City of Fresno, Fresno County Department of Social Services, Fresno County Department of Behavioral Health, Fresno County Department of Health, and Central Valley Children's Services Network**, each have proven itself to be trusted partners in the cohesive effort to lift children and families out of poverty. All have adopted and are advancing a shared community vision **under the Fresno Cradle to Career (C2C) framework and its 0-5 Blueprint, a multi-part framework in addressing poverty reduction.**

As such, Fresno EOC has participated in identifying community agenda around these **strategic goals: inclusion, education, careers, health and wellness, youth empowerment services, and emotional stability.**

In presenting the following **three intervention strategies and recommendations**, Fresno EOC **introduces its strategic framework and existing programmatic evidence**, alongside coordinated efforts within the agency's programs and with community partners and collaborators.

Number 1 of 3 Intervention Strategies:

Focus on the whole family with holistic and strength-based approach

Fresno EOC employs a **holistic and strength-based approach** in addressing every aspect of a family's poverty challenges--for both children and adults--by capitalizing on the agency's programs and resources and that of community partners and collaborators. By addressing obstacles and solving problems that block the achievement to self-sufficiency for the whole family, Fresno EOC's comprehensive array of services strives for outcomes that ensure equal access to education, housing, health, mental health, workforce development, economic opportunities, empowerment services for low-income, homeless, and migrant individuals, families, and their children.

With programs spanning 15 components and a \$100 million-plus budget, Fresno EOC touches the lives of 120,000 adults and children annually with programs range from Head Start and Early Head Start to vocational and apprenticeship training; from empowering at-risk youth in completing their high school education to senior citizen hot meal services; from energy conservation education to youth shelter and crisis intervention; from preventive health care to prenatal nutrition education; and from food distribution to rural and urban areas to job placement services. These programs are all within a strength-based family development framework designed to help people lift themselves and each other to thrive as healthy, self-sufficient, and contribution members of our communities.

Alongside the over-200 collaborators, Fresno EOC leverages resources to serve the whole family, focusing on **early childhood development, supporting disenfranchised youth in completing their education, and building skills as one transitions to gain employment and employability.**

Strategic Framework and Programmatic Evidence

1A. Early childhood development and intervention play an important role in addressing poverty in America. Research show that **high-quality preschool** for children living in poverty has long-term positive effect on many life outcome--education, economic attainment, and health. Also, examining the **two-generation approach**, data show home environment and parental education level play just as a crucial part in children's early education and development. Numerous studies have evidenced that higher-educated, higher-income parents spend more time with children and more time in educational activities. Children whose parents are college graduates are twice as likely to be on grade-level in English and math (California Dept. of Education, California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) test results for ELA and Math (2015-2017), and the Hamilton Project (2016).

Additionally, **under the Cradle to Career C2C framework**, the astute partnership of Fresno Unified School District, Fresno EOC's Head Start and Early Head Start programs, Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, First 5 Fresno, and the Central Valley Children Services Network launched the **Fresno Language Project (FLP)** to address the significant gap in language and literacy scores of **dual-language learner (DLL)** students. The collaborative work of the FLP joint leadership and resource alignment has galvanized DLL instruction and educators' professional capacity, with evidence-based content, data-driven decision-making, and reflective practice (The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, July, 2018). The Fresno Language Project plans strategically to implement its practices across all early learning programs in Fresno.

1B. Supporting disadvantaged youth and their education. Across all regions in America, youth who grow up in poor neighborhoods are significantly more likely to struggle in school, commit crimes and are victims of violent crimes, and lack sufficient skills to thrive in the workforce. The significantly higher rate at which poverty-youth drop out of high school correlates with their struggle to advance economically after leaving school and in adulthood.

In partnership with Fresno Unified School District, the **Fresno EOC's Street Saints, Head Start, Early Head Start, and School of Unlimited Learning**, the agency continues to provide a comprehensive learning experience from early childhood to high school graduation. EOC's programs empower low-income students and their parents, alike, to be prepared academically, socially, and emotionally as self-directed, lifelong learners, as they advance toward self-sufficiency.

Fresno EOC's Street Saints Program is notable for its public and private grassroots partnerships in the urban areas and has been working with other regional, state and nation-wide organizations to restore Southwest Fresno to a safe and healthy community. **Fresno EOC's CEO Brian Angus and the Director of Fresno EOC's Street Saints Program Brian King** have established strong partnerships with the faith, government,

public safety, nonprofit, and business sectors to identify underlying challenges within families and communities. The Saints has successfully implemented strategies and has created pathways to instill in our youth a sense of light and hope for their futures.

Case in point, the establishment of **Fresno EOC Street Saints' Safe Passages Program** has allowed the group to increase its presence at more sites within Fresno Unified School District. The Street Saints also has established a partnership with **California State University, Fresno**, with students who have graduated from high schools in the **93706 zip code**. These students tutor children at the Street Saints' community centers and help to prepare them for college. Additionally, the Street Saints has partnered with 4H to create the **first 4H Club in Southwest Fresno**, incorporating a curriculum with technology, science, nutrition, and youth advocacy into the Saints' after-school and summer enrichment programs.

1C. Employment and employability. Skills development and post-training support are critical aspects in fighting against poverty and in lifting low-income families and their children out of the perpetual cycle of economic disadvantage. Those with limited education, skills, and workforce training are finding themselves to be in an increasingly disadvantaged position to compete in today's global and technology-driven economy. Slow wage growth and disproportionately lack of job expansion continue to dim employment prospects for poor and low-skilled workers.

Collaborating with **Fresno Regional Workforce Investment Board, Fresno County Economic Development Corporation, Fresno City College, Fresno County Department of Social Services, and Fresno Unified School District**, Fresno EOC's programs (**Local Conservation Corps LCC, Employment and Training E&T Program, and Valley Apprentice Connection VAC**) provide hard and soft skills employment training. LCC provides paid green jobs training to young adults, ages 18 to 25. E&T targets high school graduates and out-of-school youth, ages 14 to 21, with paid work-based training, career mentoring, and educational support. Together, these Fresno EOC programs take an innovative approach to youth and community economic development in an area plagued by high rates of unemployment and crime, and low literacy rates.

Strengthening and inspiring the Fresno communities are the bedrock principles of Fresno EOC, the Street Saints, and all of its programs and services.

Call to Action

Building on the above programmatic investment, Fresno EOC compels the Task Force to continue its support of the innovative family development and employment programs for the whole family--addressing simultaneously issues concerning children and adults--from birth to career. Resolved to affect change and to ameliorate the causes of poverty, Fresno EOC is committed to continue creating innovative programs to overcome barriers of social injustice—reaching the vision to empower individuals who thrive as healthy, self-sufficient, and contributing

members of our society.

Number 2 of 3 Intervention Strategies:

Reduce the number of regulations governing the human services sector

When policymakers create or expand regulations, the effects disproportionately burden low-income individuals and households. Administratively, the regressive nature of regulations restricts and confines the collaborative nature of social services work. Research have shown that low-income families are often confronted with multiple challenges--from education and employment to housing and health issues. Collaborating and streamlining needed services have proven to be the most effective and efficient vehicles to accomplish impact. However, given the number of governance and their risk-averse bias, legislations and regulations have deterred and created challenges to delivering best practice.

Expressing it differently, even though most social and human services programs are federally funded, local agencies bear greater responsibility for administering them. Effectively, poverty solutions start locally. Given the collaborative systems that make up the social safety net for families in crisis, all too often, though, the local response is stymied by state and federal regulations.

Call to Action

The tools which government has traditionally relied for regulating human services are no longer effective and new ways of thinking are now required. Fresno EOC calls for reforms in this area to deliver services with improved productivity that are family centric and community driven.

To better address local poverty issues and to respond to those in need, Fresno EOC supports the Task Force's consideration of Waivers for local programs and agencies to streamline their services. Waivers will empower and allow local first-responders in social services to most cogently, efficiently, and economically solve systemic and persistent poverty issues and their risk indicators.

Number 3 of 3 Intervention Strategies:

Affordable Housing

Affordable housing was identified as a need in the Fresno EOC's 2016-2017 Strategic Needs Assessment. In 2017, the number of chronic homeless population in Fresno County was 631 (Street 2 Home Fresno County, 2018). Causes of homelessness are myriad and, often, they are also the consequences: (1) housing is out of reach--supply and affordability, (2) inadequate income, (3) health issues, and (4) domestic violence and trauma. **Fresno EOC's Sanctuary and Youth Services provides emergency transitional, and permanent supportive housing to chronically homeless individuals**

and runaway, homeless, exploited, or displaced youth. Continuing to combat chronic and unsheltered homelessness, Fresno EOC has a **strong partnership with Fresno Housing Authority**, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Marjorie Mason Center, Fresno-Madera Continuum of Care, and private landlords and property managers.

Call to Action

Fresno EOC advocates for the Task Force's support in City of Fresno and Fresno Housing Authority's emerging efforts to establish collective impact to end homelessness, with additional funding options and continuing collaboration. It endorses the Housing Authority's four focused areas of work: (1) shared leadership, alignment and community engagement, (2) reduce inflow to homelessness, (3) improve crisis response, and (4) increase exits to permanent housing and services.

Half a century has passed since President Lyndon B. Johnson enacted the Equal Opportunity Act of 1964, as a part of his War on Poverty, encompassing President John F. Kennedy's Civil Rights Act of 1964. Since then, countless Americans have enjoyed the advances made possible on behalf of their fight for self-sufficiency and to lift their children and families out of poverty. Fresno EOC, along with other Fresno and Central Valley nonprofit organizations, faith community, governmental entities, and educational institutions, has shared in the transformation of their industrious relationship to launch strategic partnerships and programs by adopting and advancing a joint community vision--and via collect impact and resource alignment.

And, therefore, Fresno EOC might well feel that something more than a simple matter of style in the submission of this policy paper, would be necessary to help continue the war on poverty on the state level. It was in President Johnson's inaugural speech on the "unconditional war" on poverty where he compelled all Americans to live "up to our best hopes as people who value the dignity and potential of every human being." He saw it essential, then, just as today not to alienate ourselves from the realities of millions of American who still linger in poverty--whose realities include poor health, lack of safe shelters, insufficient food and nutrition, inequities in educational and employment opportunities, and the lack of social advancements. It is the responsibility of us all not to retreat, nor to diminish our own control of our collective destinies in the future. The true interests of our people and our nation have become all too great to ignore.

With the establishment of AB 1520 The Governor's Task Force to Lifting Children and Families Out of Poverty, the time has come to further this cause and to advance new and innovative responses to the war on poverty. Before it is too late and on behalf of our partner agencies, Fresno EOC respectfully submits this policy paper and proposes our collective resources for the Task Force's endeavors.